

Motor City Final Four coming at us in high gear

Detroit and Ford Field might have seemed futuristic in October. Not in January. The first week of April and the Final Four are coming fast.

While David Worlock was in Philadelphia to go over everything involving first and second-round NCAA Tournament games at the Wachovia Center, we shared lunch at the world's great cheesesteak joint in Northeast Philly and discuss plans for Final Four weekend.

Worlock, the associate director of the men's basketball championship, loved the cheesesteak. Everybody does. If you see me in Philly in March, ask and I either will take you there or give you directions. The very politically incorrect Chink's is just 15 minutes north of the Wachovia Center, a few minutes off I-95.

Meanwhile, the USBWA Awards Breakfast is scheduled for Friday, April 3 from 8-9:30 a.m. at the Detroit Athletic Club. This has become a not-to-be missed event where we present the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year award, the Henry Iba Coach of the Year award and our Most Courageous award. We will vote on those awards in March.

The USBWA Board will meet with the basketball committee on Saturday, April 4 from 8-9 a.m. in the Ambassador Ballroom, Salon 3, level 3 of the Marriott Renaissance.

The USBWA annual meeting/breakfast will be Monday, April 6, at 9 a.m. in the Ambassador Ballroom, Salon A, level 3 of the Marriott. Free food. USBWA business.

Dick Jerardi
Philadelphia Daily News
President



Katha Quinn Award. Writing awards.

And there will be basketball games. The pre-semifinal breakout sessions with the players that began last year have been moved from Friday to Thursday afternoon, 1:05-3:20 p.m., at Ford Field.

If you are at Ford Field Thursday, hang for NCAA president Myles Brand's news conference. That will be at 3:45, followed by an NABC news conference at 4:45.

All credentials are to be picked up at Ford Field. Do yourself and the NCAA a favor and submit a photo when you apply for a credential. That will speed up the process when you go to pick up your credential.

If you run into me over the weekend and have any suggestions about Final Four weekend or anything involving the USBWA, please stop me and let's discuss.

If you want to talk about something and don't see me, e-mail me and I will find the time.

Final Four weekend is a great time to recruit new members. That is really up to us. If you know somebody that should be in the USBWA, talk to them about the benefits and show them how they can join.

We need to get younger and more diverse. Our world has changed. If you know people in the dot.com world who write about college basketball, get them involved in the USBWA. If you know people who write for their college paper about college hoops, get them involved.

Final Four weekend is a celebration of the season. It is a time to look back, but, for us, it is a time to look forward. It is a rare opportunity for all of us to help make the USBWA the best organization it can be.

Feinstein, Wahl, Freedman dominate USBWA best-writing contest

John Feinstein of the Washington Post took a first place and two seconds, Grant Wahl of Sports Illustrated finished first and second and Lew Freedman of Basketball captured first- and fourth-place awards in the U.S. Basketball Writers Association best-writing contest.

Robbi Pickeral of the Raleigh News & Observer and Bud Withers of the Seattle Times also won individual categories.

Feinstein took first in spot news/game-story for a piece on American University's first trip to the NCAA Tournament in 41 years. Feinstein finished second in moderate-length features and column writing.

Wahl won in magazine-length feature writing for a story about the popularity of the dribble-drive offense. Wahl also took second in enterprise/series reporting.

Freedman won for a column about the recollections of former Loyola (Ill.) players on their forgotten long-ignored barrier-breaking NCAA championship and finished fourth in game story/spot news reporting.

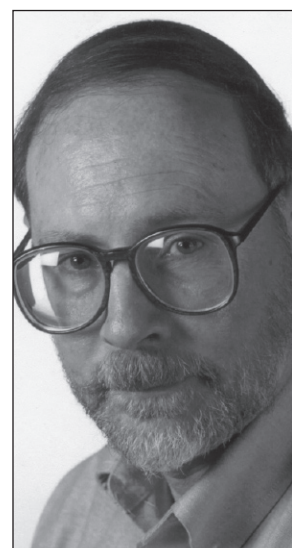
Pickeral won in enterprise/series reporting for a pro-



John Feinstein



Grant Wahl



Lew Freedman

file on North Carolina coach Roy Williams.

Withers won for moderate-length feature about Jeremy Pargo's journey from south Chicago to Gonzaga.

Other second-place finishers included Jeff Fox of CollegeHoopsnet.com (magazine-length features) and

Kellis Robinett of the Idaho State Journal (spot news/game story).

Finishing third: Ken Davis of NBC-Sports.com (enterprise/series); Gordie Jones of The Morning Call (magazine-length); Rob Schultz of the Madison Capital Times (moderate-length); David Jones of the Harrisburg Patriot-News (columns); and Fran Blinebury of the Houston Chronicle (spot news/game story).

Other fourth-place finishers: Jack Styczynski, Basketball Times (enterprise/series); J. Brady McCullough, Kansas City Star (magazine-length features); Marty Dobrow of the Boston Globe (medium-length features); and Rick Bozich of the Louisville Courier-Journal (columns).

Fifth-place finishers: Ian Rapoport, Birmingham News (enterprise/series); Mike Sorensen, Deseret Morning News (magazine-length); Bryan Burwell, St. Louis Post Dispatch (medium-length); Gary Parish, CBS Sports Line (columns); and Pete Thamel of the New York Times (spot news).

For full results, see page 4.

The United States Basketball Writers Association
 1818 Chouteau Avenue
 St. Louis, Mo. 63103
 Visit us at: www.usbwa.com
 314-421-0339
 Fax: 314-421-3505, 314-421-6120

PRESIDENT – Dick Jerardi, Philadelphia Daily News; C: 215-313-3079; H: 215-295-8097; jerardd@phillynews.com
FIRST VICE PRESIDENT – Steve Carp, Las Vegas Review-Journal; O: 702-387-2913; H: 702-243-9109; C: 702-528-2790; scarp@reviewjournal.com
SECOND VICE PRESIDENT – Bryan Burwell, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, O: 314-340-8185; H: 636-536-0332, C: 314-603-0463; bburwell@post-dispatch.com
THIRD VICE PRESIDENT – Lenox Rawlins, Winston-Salem Journal; H: 336-272-2029; C: 336-580-5023; len30@triad.rr.com
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Joe Mitch, Missouri Valley Conference, O: 314-421-0339; H: 314-227-9113; C: 314-795-6821; mitch@mvc.org
TIPOFF EDITOR – John Akers, Basketball Times, C: 612-718-4661; H: 704-849-8627; johna19081@gmail.com
WEBMASTER – Ted Gangi, C: 214-909-9314; ted.gangi@sportswriters.net
BOARD MEMBERS
DISTRICT I – Ed Daigneault, Waterbury (Conn.) Republican-American; H: 860-945-3506; O: 800-992-3232, ext. 1406; C: 203-206-0959; sptsscribe@sbcglobal.net
DISTRICT II – David Jones, Harrisburg Patriot-News; O: 717-255-8187; C: 717-319-1837; djones8681@comcast.net
DISTRICT III – Robbi Pickeral, Raleigh News & Observer, O: 716-372-3121, ext. 278; C: 716-244-0427; rpickeral@aol.com
DISTRICT IV – John Clay, Lexington Herald-Leader; O: 859-231-3226; C: 859-321-5362; johnclay@alltel.net
DISTRICT V – Kirk Wessler, Peoria Journal Star; O: 309-686-3216; C: 309-256-9093; kwessler@pjstar.com
DISTRICT VI – Dave Sittler, Tulsa World; O: 918-581-8312; C: 918-629-3851; dave.sittler@tulsaworld.com
DISTRICT VII – Ted Lewis, New Orleans Times-Picayune; O/C: 504-232-5071; tlewis@timespicayune.com
DISTRICT VIII – John Henderson, Denver Post; 303-282-4937; jhenderson@denverpost.com
DISTRICT IX – Nicole Vargas, San Diego Union-Tribune. C: 619-252-4098; Nicole.Vargas@uniontrib.com
WOMEN – Mel Greenberg, Philadelphia Daily Inquirer; C: 215-313-3542; mgreenberg@phillynews.com
AT-LARGE – Dana O’Neil, espn.com; C: 215-313-3425; dgoneil@msn.com
SID – Scott Chipman, Big Ten Conference; C: 630-936-6005; schipman@bigten.org.

Michigan State’s ’79 champs to highlight Final Four breakfast

This year’s USBWA breakfast to honor the nation’s player and coach of the year figures to be a social highlight at the Final Four in Detroit in April.

In addition to presenting the Oscar Robertson Player of the Year Trophy and the Henry Iba Coach of the Year Award, the USBWA also plans to honor the 1979 Michigan State NCAA Final Four team on the 30th anniversary of the Spartans’ national championship.

The breakfast will be held the day before the national semifinals on Friday, April 3, at the downtown Detroit Athletic Club, beginning at 8 a.m.

The USBWA has received commitments from former Michigan State coach Jud Heathcote and current coach Tom Izzo to attend the breakfast. The Michigan State basketball office also has committed to send invitations on behalf of the USBWA to the players and coaches of the 1979 team.

It is hopeful that Magic Johnson will make an appearance at the breakfast. USBWA Past President Andy Katz said he would approach Magic and felt encouraged since Johnson is under contract to ESPN and probably would be attending the Final Four.

This will be the fifth straight season that the USBWA has held a breakfast at the Final Four for the general public to honor its national coach and player of the year.

The event has been a sellout every year. Revenue from the breakfast underwrites the USBWA’s journalism scholarship program and helps fund the organization’s operating budget.

A portion of the proceeds from the breakfast is also given to the National Kidney Foundation on behalf of Oscar Robertson, who several years ago donated one of his kidneys to his daughter.

The USBWA renamed its player of the year award after Robertson in 1998. It is the nation’s oldest such award and the only one named after a player. The “Big

Joe Mitch
USBWA
Executive Director



O” was the association’s first player of the year recipient in 1958. He was named College Player of the Century by the National Association of Basketball Coaches in 1999.

By honoring Michigan State’s 1979 national-championship team, the USBWA is continuing the tradition of recognizing individuals or teams from the geographical area of the Final Four site for their contributions to college basketball and the impact they made on the sport.

At the first breakfast in St. Louis in 2005, the USBWA honored retired coach Lou Henson, who took two teams – New Mexico State and Illinois – to the Final Four.

The following year in Indianapolis, the USBWA recognized Indiana’s 1976 team on the 30th anniversary of the Hoosiers’ national championship.

At the 2007 breakfast in Atlanta, the USBWA honored the state of Georgia’s three Final Four teams – Georgia in 1983 and Georgia Tech in 1990 and 2004.

Last year, the USBWA recognized the former chair of San Antonio’s Local Organizing Committee for his efforts to bring the first Final Four to San Antonio in 1998.

The USBWA has the full support and endorsement of the NCAA, which lists the breakfast in its Final Four schedule of events and was actively involved in securing the site for the event.

Tickets for the breakfast are \$75 each for the general public and \$60 for USBWA members.

The USBWA is negotiating with WWJ radio in Detroit to serve as a media partner for the breakfast and has secured a Detroit public-relations firm, Jonathan Witz & Associates, to publicize and coordinate the event.

USBWA Membership Application Form

If you have not yet renewed your membership to the U.S. Basketball Writers Association, now is the time to act. For your \$40 membership fee you will receive:

- the most complete directory in college basketball
 - Marriott Athletic VIP Card
 - voting for All-America team and player and coach of year
 - seven issues of *Basketball Times*;
 - access to USBWA website (usbwa.com)
 - eligibility for Best Writing Contest, with cash prizes
- Send a check for \$40 and let the USBWA make your job of covering college basketball easier.

Name _____

Newspaper/Publication/Website/College _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Office Telephone _____ Cell Phone _____

Fax _____ Email Address _____

USBWA
 1818 Chouteau Avenue
 St. Louis, MO 63103

When lines of communication break down, we're here to help

By and large, there is a peaceful co-existence between college-basketball coaches and the media who cover them.

Sure, coaches like to exert control, whether it's closing the locker room or practice, keeping freshmen off-limits or limiting player access to a couple times a week.

We in the media know that up front, so we adjust and we learn to deal with it. We're never happy about it, but it usually doesn't prevent us from doing our jobs. We might have to work a little harder than we would like, but in the end, we usually get the desired story.

So it was a little surprising and somewhat sad to have received Dan Wolken's e-mail last month. Dan covers Memphis for the *Commercial Appeal* newspaper and with the Tigers set to play Lamar, Dan found a good angle for a story – former Memphis head coach Tic Price was now an assistant at Lamar. And while Price's career at Memphis ended in controversy and his dismissal in 1999, the *Commercial Appeal* had done subsequent stories with Price, apparently with no problem.

Dan went through the proper channels, contacting Brian Henry, the SID at Lamar, to talk to both Price and head coach Steve Roccaforte, who also had Memphis ties. He was told, no problem, so his game plan was set.

The interview with Roccaforte went fine. But when it came time to talk to Price, Roccaforte said his policy is to not allow his assistants talk to the media and that he wasn't about to change it for Dan.

Obviously, this changed Dan's story plans. He did a little digging around and found that Roccaforte's assistants do indeed talk to the media.

Steve Carp Las Vegas Review Journal Vice President



So was Dan a target of "selective enforcement?" Or did Lamar have a communication lapse between SID, coach and journalist?

If it was the former, that's a problem, because you can't single out media you might consider "hostile" and shut them out. If it's the latter, then there needs to be a better way to make sure everyone is on the same page. If indeed, that's the policy, Dan should have been told that up front. He wouldn't have liked it, but he would have understood, and he would have went in a different direction from the outset.

USBWA president Dick Jerardi sent Henry a letter Jan. 5 looking for a little clarification on the matter. He heard back a few days later. Henry claimed that Dan's request did not fall within the established guidelines of 24 hours advance notice, but that Lamar was willing to make an exception in getting Roccaforte on the phone.

He also claimed that Dan only wanted to talk to Price about his time at Memphis and that he attempted to get

Price's cell phone number from the reporters at the *Enterprise* in Beaumont, Texas, instead of asking Henry to give it to him, which Henry wasn't likely to do.

Wolken claims he did not try to get Price's cell number from the Beaumont paper. He did, however, try to get the paper to confirm the interview policy.

"I wish the response (from Lamar) would have talked more to the specifics of the issue," Jerardi said. "We just want to make sure our members get an opportunity to do their job as best that they can."

My take on it is this: No SID wants to see his school receive negative publicity. But SIDs don't control the news. It is not Henry's job to tell Wolken what he can and can't write, which is essentially what he's doing when he doesn't make Price available.

As for accusing Wolken of making an end run, Henry obviously was never reporter. Reporters exchange information all the time, including phone numbers.

CONTINUED on Page 4

Knightline: Are coaches or writers the more worthy evaluators?

When Bob Knight talks, it's hard not to listen. Knight is a larger-than-life character whose achievements in sports make him impossible to ignore. Sometimes he says things and you smile. Too often, he says things that make you cringe. But the one thing I love about Knight is that he's a rare sort of basketball-coaching icon/emotional storm cloud who can command respect, provoke debate and enlighten and disturb minds in the blink of an eye.

I don't always agree with Knight, but I can never dismiss him. Last week was another one of those impossible-to-ignore moments, when the legendary coach who has settled quite nicely into retirement as a basketball "consultant" to ESPN (fyi coach: You're not really a "consultant." You've crossed over to the dark side.), made a great point about how we in sports can't get our Hall of Fame voting right.

In the aftermath of another semi-controversial baseball Hall of Fame vote by the pro baseball writers, Knight raised the question on ESPN why writers and broadcasters – many of whom never played the game at a high level – were in charge of such a significant process as determining the athletic immortality of those men and women who did.

In Knight's mind, this is a terrible mistake. The conversation was sparked by baseball, but it could have been about every acknowledgement and sport where writers and broadcasters have a hand in determining who receives such lofty awards.

Whether you agree with Knight or not, you still have to admit that it's a worthwhile discussion.

Personally, I think it's a fair question. Whether it's a vote for the Oscar Robertson, Naismith or Heisman trophies or the basketball, football or baseball Halls of Fame, I firmly believe that every sports writer needs to put ego aside and take an honest personal assessment of

Bryan Burwell St. Louis Post-Dispatch Vice President



whether they are qualified to cast such a significant vote.

Ego aside, who among us deserves to be entrusted with the responsibility?

But here's where I differ with Knight to a certain degree. He assumes that journalists as a whole are immediately unqualified for the job. That's no more correct than assuming that every coach or ex-player is qualified.

Here's where I think Knight is right. We ought to carefully take a long hard look at the process. In baseball, where there are more than 500 voting members of the baseball writers association who cast votes for the Cooperstown Hall (and too many of them who are lifetime voters who no longer actively cover the game), the numbers are too unwieldy.

But closer to home, I just wish we could do a better job of self-policing our own ranks to make sure that we are placing the responsibility for these awards in the right hands to avoid giving even a hint of credibility to criticisms like the one Knight registered.

If someone asks you to participate in the Robertson, Naismith or Heisman voting, decline the invitation if you're unwilling or able to put in the hard work to make

sure you're picking the right player or coach. That means watching the games. Lots of them. Have the critical conversations with players, coaches and scouts whose well-trained eyes can provide insights that you might lack.

I think to a certain extent, Knight's objections have some substance. Some folks don't deserve to hold that sort of significant power. Voting for these significant awards and Halls of Fame are privileges, not rights granted to you simply because you have a press pass dangling around your neck and a prime seat at courtside.

But I also think that the folks who agree with Bob Knight need to do a little soul searching too. If every coach or ex-player who was charged with voting was as dedicated a guardian of the game as the legendary former coach, I would gladly insist that more votes should be placed in the hands of the proper custodians.

Knight is one of the most brilliant basketball craftsmen to ever stalk a sideline. Even in retirement, he takes his job seriously, and I'd trust him with the daunting responsibility of evaluating who belongs in the basketball Hall of Fame any day. But come on, not every coach or

CONTINUED on Page 4

Cure for the common quote? Leave the podium for politicians

I'd like to offer this column as a eulogy, a less than fond farewell to the podium and its first cousin, the table. The lectern has had its day in sports – it was there in front of John Calipari when John Chaney stormed in, threatening to kill the UMass coach – but it needs to be retired.

It's meant for presidents and congressmen, college professors and bank CEOs. You know the type, people who want to talk at us, not to us, people over the age of 35. In other words, coaches, not athletes (special dispensation to the over-35 rule for Brad Stevens at Butler and Tommy Dempsey at Rider).

If there's a bigger killjoy to a great quote than a podium and a microphone, I'd like to see it. I covered Villanova for seven years, and I swear the microphone and table hypnotized the Wildcats into explaining good wins by saying, "We just played Villanova basketball." Which isn't to be confused with UConn basketball, Saint Joseph's basketball or Our Lady of Sorrows basketball. (Is that what the Cats played when they lost?)

There is a reason why most college students don't enjoy class presentations and oral reports. It forces them to stand up in a semi-formal setting and speak to people. It's awkward and stilted, bound to induce a cataclysmic rise in the use of the word, "Um." And that would be in front of a small classroom of students with whom they're

fairly familiar. Imagine, then, how a student might feel in front of a bunch of strangers, writing down every word he says or, worse, recording every word while a camera is pointed directly at him?

Bull Durham educating Nuke LaLoosh comes to mind.

The podium/table certainly has been eased out of the spotlight, and I'm grateful for that.

But it has not yet been fully eradicated. I want last rites and a burial.

I get that sports-information directors are in a quandary. Television cameras prefer folks at the podium. Cleaner shot. But I beseech you – no, I flat-out beg you – that if

you absolutely must put your otherwise affable and quotable player in a setting better suited for news conferences about invading Iraq, then please also allow him to stick around and chat with us less informally afterward.

Chances are, he won't say anything you wish he hadn't. Chances are, in fact, he'll say something kind of interesting and personable that will make our stories more interesting, your team more interesting and your fans more interested in your team.

It's a win-win-win.

So please, raise a glass with me to the piece of furniture that has gotten in the way of too many good stories.

RIP, podium. I won't miss you.

Dana O'Neil
ESPN.com
USBWA Board Member



Pickeral, Withers also capture first-place writing honors

Enterprise/Series

First place – Robbi Pickeral, Raleigh News & Observer: Profile on Hall of Fame coach Roy Williams.

Second place – Grant Wahl, Sports Illustrated: A look at excessive harassment of opposing players by fans.

Third place – Ken Davis, NBCSports.com: History of cutting down of the nets to celebrate a championship.

Fourth place: Jack Styczynski, Basketball Times: Duke on top again in third analytical ranking of Division I schools that have won two-thirds of their games in last 10 seasons.

Fifth place – Ian Rapoport, Birmingham News: Atlanta tornado damages Georgia Dome, scrambles schedule of NCAA tournament games.

Magazine Length

First place – Grant Wahl, Sports Illustrated: Analyzing the dribble-drive offense that's all the rage in basketball today.

Second place – Jeff Fox, CollegeHoopsnet.com: Feature on Tennessee's Chris Lofton.

Third place – Gordie Jones, The Morning Call (Pa.): Three-part series about a game between two one-loss Division III teams in Pennsylvania, DeSales and Elizabethtown.

Fourth place – J. Brady McCollough, Kansas City Star: Bill Self's story began in Oklahoma, where his ties are strong, but he's found a home at basketball-crazy Kansas.

Fifth place – Mike Sorensen, Deseret Morning News: Utah's Jim Boylen gets his long-awaited chance to become a head coach.

Moderate Length Features

First place – Bud Withers, Seattle Times: Jeremy Pargo's journey from south Chicago to Gonzaga co-captain.

Second place – John Feinstein, Washington Post: Former Maryland assistant and La Salle head coach Billy Hahn gets a second chance in coaching.

Third place – Rob Schultz, Madison Capital Times: Wisconsin senior Michael Flowers' touching story about how meeting a 5-year-old boy with cancer affected his life.

Fourth place – Marty Dobrow, Boston Globe: A prized journey to the magic of New York's Garden begins with a single step for Massachusetts' Dante Milligan.

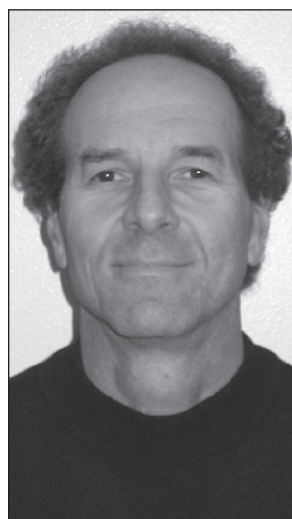
Fifth place – Bryan Burwell, St. Louis Post-Dispatch: The enigmatic odyssey of Missouri guard Stehfon Hannah.

Columns

First place – Lew Freedman, Basketball Times: Loyola recalls color barrier-breaking moment long forgotten and ig-



Robbi Pickeral



Bud Withers

nored.

Second place – John Feinstein, Washington Post: Comparing Roy Williams to his mentor, Dean Smith.

Third place – David Jones, Harrisburg Patriot-News: Remembering Bob Knight.

Fourth place – Rick Bozich, Louisville Courier-Journal: Indiana, buried and burned by the Kelvin Sampson ugly scandal, has no one to blame but itself.

Fifth place – Gary Parrish, CBS SportsLine: How silver-tongued Memphis Coach John Calipari can talk a mailman into going for a walk on his day off.

Spot News/Game Story

First place – John Feinstein, Washington Post: American University's first trip to the NCAA Tournament in 41 years.

Second place – Kellis Robinett, Idaho State Journal: Montana's overtime win over Idaho State.

Third place – Fran Blinbury, Houston Chronicle: Kansas' Final Four semifinal win over North Carolina.

Fourth place – Lew Freedman, Basketball Times: Illinois-Chicago Coach Jimmy Collins returns from near-death, has his smile back and is having fun.

Fifth place – Pete Thamel, New York Times: No-name West Virginia Mountaineers stun Duke's All-Americans in NCAA tournament, soak up the irony.

Carp

CONTINUED from Page 3

This could have been resolved easily. Henry should have either denied Wolken's request on the spot, citing Lamar's interview policy. Or once he approved the request, he should have made sure Price talked to the reporter. If Price doesn't want to talk about his past, that's his right, and he simply could have said to Dan, "Sorry, I'm not discussing my time at Memphis."

But to make up the rules as you go along doesn't seem right. It appears that was the case here.

One of the reasons USBWA exists is to help its members in situations such as this. We might not be able to get it resolved right on the spot, but we can be an advocate for correcting abuses or misunderstandings for the future.

If you ever have a situation or an incident where you feel your ability to do your job has been compromised, let us know. We might not be able to resolve the matter on the spot. But we can certainly speak to those responsible on your behalf to make sure there are no repeat episodes.

Drop any of the officers an e-mail or give us a call. We'll do our best to go to bat for you and help all we can to make your job as hassle-free as possible.

Burwell

CONTINUED from Page 3

ex-player – or current player – takes the game as seriously as Knight.

Coaches and ex-players bring just as many hidden agendas to the process as any sports writer. Some of the same men who are dismissive of writers are the same ones who hand their weekly ballots in the *USA Today* weekly coaches polls to their sports-information directors.

Many of them are tunnel-vision mad geniuses who wouldn't know Stephen Curry from curried goat because the All-America guard isn't on a DVD of conference opponent game breakdowns handed to him each morning by an assistant coach.

The truth is, the best custodians of the game can come from every walk of the sporting life. A whistle around your neck isn't an immediate qualifier any more than a press pass is an immediate disqualifier.